

EATON DESCRIBES AN OPERA HOUSE COMEDY IN SECOND NEW YORK LETTER

Leo Ditrichstein and the Hattons Satirize Operatic Amours in "The Great Lover," a Play of Sentiment, Satire and Charm

THE Hattons, of Chicago, collaborating with Leo Ditrichstein, have dramatized the male opera star, who is the Don Giovanni of his generation, both on and off the stage. The original Don came to his end at the hands of the commander's chest; but this reincarnation comes to his end merely by losing his voice, and his tragedy is that he faces a long life of recollections of past performances, rather than anticipations of performances to come. We refer, of course, to performances in the court of love no less than on the stage of opera. The play is called "The Great



Lover," and the leading part is taken by Mr. Ditrichstein himself. The production was an instantaneous hit and will likely be in New York for the rest of the winter.

Three factors contribute to the chance of success for a play with this theme. First, the stars of the music world, especially of opera, seem always to live a life apart, and with them we unconsciously always associate the glamor of great auditoriums alive with lights and jewels, the throb of orchestras, the peal of songs. They are predestined characters of romance. Second, the tragedy of the middle-aged artist, the failing of voice, the vanishing of charm, is a tragedy which appeals peculiarly to the interest and the compassion of laymen, especially of the gentler sex. It is a tragedy for any woman to find the wrinkles round her eyes, and she knows how keen a tragedy it must be for the beautiful actress to realize some morning that she is no longer beautiful, that her day is over. Perhaps there are more of us males than admit it who know the pangs of sorrow at our failure any longer to attract the female smile, and we can understand the tragedy of Don Giovanni—we who in our secret hearts have always envied him.

Third, a play about the opera, with the scene laid in New York, with the set reproducing exactly the director's room in the Metropolitan Opera House, with the leading character called Paurel (one letter changed would make it Maurel, who was the greatest impersonator of the Don in his generation), and with much of the acting duplicating what we have read about the rows between singers and the trials and tribulations of directors with these temperamental children—such a play is sure to attract curiosity in New York. It seems, somehow, peculiarly our own. Romantic though it is, it answers our need for a play about ourselves.

So "The Great Lover," granted a good cast, a good director and a bit of skill in the writing was about as sure fire as anything can be in the theatre. It got the good cast, it got one of our best stage directors in San Forret, general stage director for Cohan and Harris, and it is written with skill and briskness. The result is a packed house at every performance.

The first act is the liveliest, and is largely given over to a picture of the troubles of the manager of the opera house. Singers to right of him, singers to left of him, conductors behind him and in front of him volley and splutter. The major portion of the drama occurs in the second act, in Paurel's dressing room, between acts of "Don Giovanni." Paurel is in love with Ethel Warren, a young American girl, a soprano in the company. She, in turn, is really in love with Carlo Sonino, a young American-born baritone, understudy to the great Paurel. But Sonino is jealous of her, and in a fit of pique she says she will marry Paurel. However, Sabittini, Italian soprano, old flame of Paurel, is to be reckoned with. In the excitement of the scene she causes, Paurel shouts and storms—and suddenly his voice leaves him. At the end of the act he stands sobbing by the door while his youthful rival is heard out on the stage, singing gloriously the music of the world's most glorious opera.

In the last act Paurel learns that he will never sing again. He also realizes that Miss Warren does not really love him, and he makes the one sacrifice he has ever made in his pampered life and gives her up. Then he is left alone with his old servant and his love letters—20 years of love letters, catalogued by seasons. The old servant gets them out. They are his version of Leporello's list! Yet the telephone rings at the end, and it is a woman. He is making a date with her as the curtain falls. Thus should Don Giovanni pass out—game to the finish.

Mr. Ditrichstein's performance of Paurel is superficially a vivid characterization touched with whimsical ex-

tricity, full of childlike vanities, delicately Latin in its suavity and Latin, too, in its gusts of temper. It is superficially so vivid, indeed, that perhaps many people will not realize that it is lacking in genuine romantic charm, and consequently lacking in what should be the closing note of the play—pathos. That the pathos would be ironic does not alter our statement. When we pause to think how Mansfield would have played that closing act, we can see Mr. Ditrichstein's limitations. We may well pause, too, to reflect how Mansfield would have looked in his costume of the Don—dressed probably more as Renaud dressed him than in the conventional doublet and hose—Mansfield with a magnificent romantic swagger, with a style free from all taint of the finicky, with gestures that were not cramped, but seemed to sweep with the sweep of the orchestral rhythm. It is a limitation of Mr. Ditrichstein that he cannot be truly romantic nor pathetic, and that he cannot quite measure up to the grand style of an operatic hero. Since his performance, which is, indeed, a notable one, is now being hailed as a supremely great one, it is wise to make these reservations in the interest of truth. It is not a great performance any more than the play is a great play. It is the kind of a performance our stage ought to be able to show half a dozen times a season—but, alas, in recent years doesn't furnish more than in every two or three seasons.

In such a play as this, where so many of the characters must look foreign and splutter in German, French and Italian, naturally the cast has been chosen for their fitness thus to splutter. Where all the Italians came from we do not know, but they seem to be quite as good actors as anybody could wish for. Miss Beverley Sitgreaves, one of the best players our native stage boasts, takes the part of the Italian prima donna, however, and gives a vivid and delightfully tempera-

LOUIS MANN ON THE ART OF ACTING

Acting depends upon the player's sense of time in gaining points. Some acting is static—getting effects by silence and radiation.

Some acting is dynamic—even using vociferous attack.

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